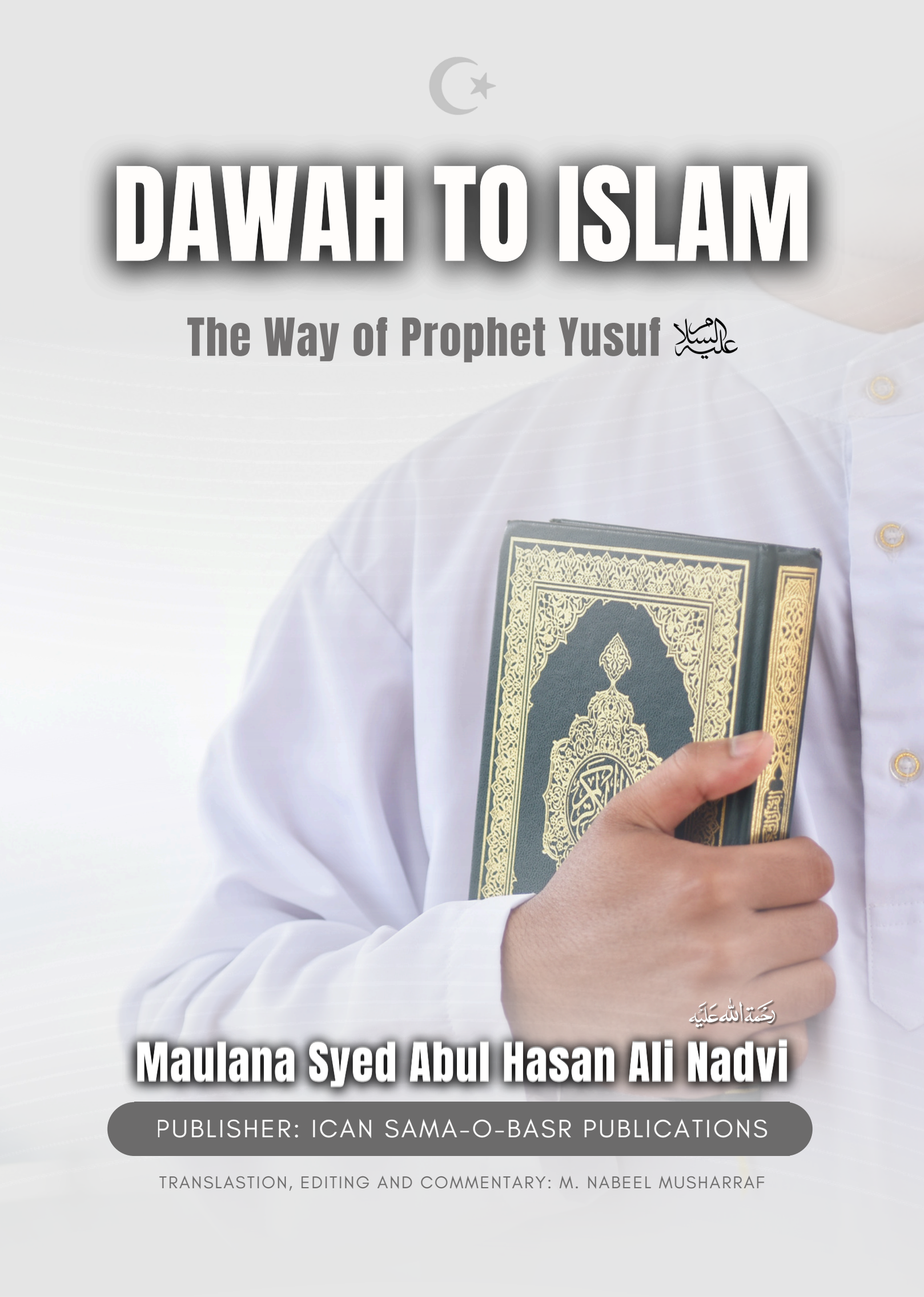
DAWAH TO ISLAM

The Way of Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام



رحمة الله عليه

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اَعُوْذُ بِاللهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيْمِ

Sama-O-Basr

لِوَجْهِ ٱللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنكُمْ جَزَآءً وَلَا شُكُورًا

Only for Allah's pleasure! We neither seek reward from you nor thanks.

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Foreword

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

Daʿwah towards Allah SWT is one of the key themes in the Qur'an. As a book of guidance, it calls minds to awaken, hearts to reflect, and lives to submit to the One Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds. It reminds humanity that worldly life is a test, and that every action will be accounted for before Allah ﷻ in the life to come, where reward and punishment will be made manifest. These realities are presented in the Qur'an with remarkable beauty, wisdom, and depth, leaving a lasting impact on those who study it with attention and sincerity.

Such study, however, is most fruitful when guided by scholars who combine sound knowledge with deep insight and practical experience in daʿwah. Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi R.A. was one such scholar. He devoted nearly his entire life to the work of daʿwah and tarbiyah, employing his exceptional intellectual, literary, and spiritual abilities in the service of Islam. He was a distinguished authority in Arabic literature, tafsīr, and ḥadīth, an eloquent writer and speaker with a unique style, and a eminent scholar of history. His deep study of the rise and fall of nations, and of the intellectual, social, and spiritual history of Islam and Muslims, enabled him to draw meaningful parallels between past civilizations and the present condition of the Muslim Ummah. His deep scholarship bore rich fruits, extending benefit to people both near and far.

In the closing year of the fourteenth Islamic century, one such fruit manifested itself in the form of an important initiative launched at Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama to further this mission. A prominent educational institution was established with the purpose of training students in the

principles of daʿwah and tablīgh, and of cultivating sound Islamic thought. This institution was named *Al-Maʿhad al-ʿĀlī li'd-Daʿwah wa'l-Fikr al-Islāmī*. In its very first academic year, Hazrat Maulana delivered a series of lectures on the Qur'anic method of daʿwah, presenting profound insights drawn directly from the Book of Allah.

These lectures, eight in number, were later compiled and published by Majlis-e-Tahqeeqat wa Nashriyat. From among them, the lecture examining the daʿwah of Prophet Yusuf A.S. was selected for separate publication. In this lecture, Maulana Nadvi R.A. highlights the extraordinary wisdom, subtlety, and effectiveness of Prophet Yusuf's method of inviting to Allah—particularly in the delicate environment of the prison, before interpreting the dreams of his fellow inmates. He presents this episode as a model of daʿwah that combines compassion, clarity, patience, and perfect timing, and offers a deeply reflective commentary upon it.

This booklet was first published independently from Washington by Maulana Muhammad Usman. iCAN Sama-O-Basr Publications now has the privilege of presenting its English translation, so that English-speaking readers may also benefit from these enduring lessons. At a time when the need for wise, thoughtful, and principled daʿwah is greater than ever, this work serves as a timely reminder that the Qur'an itself provides the finest models for inviting hearts to Allah.

All praise belongs to Allah, and blessings and peace be upon His Messenger Muhammad ibn ʿAbdullah ﷺ, upon his family, and upon all his companions. May Allah accept this effort, grant it widespread benefit, and make it a means of guidance for those who seek the truth.

Editorial Team,

iCAN Sama-O-Basr Publications (Jan 22, 2026)

Overview of the Selected Ayat

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

Today, I will present an example from the method of da'wah of Prophet Yusuf, peace be upon him. Let us first read those noble ayaat in which this style of da'wah is mentioned:

Surah Yūsuf — Ayat 36–41

12:36

وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السِّجْنَ فَتَيَانِ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا وَقَالَ الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْزًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ نَبِّئْنَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And two young men entered the prison with him. One of them said, "Indeed, I saw myself pressing wine." And the other said, "Indeed, I saw myself carrying bread on my head from which the birds were eating. Tell us the interpretation of this, for indeed we see you as one who does good."

12:37

قَالَ لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمَا ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

He said, "No food will come to you that you are to be given except that I will inform you of its interpretation before it comes to you. That is from what my Lord has taught me. Indeed, I have left the religion of a people who do not believe in Allah, and who are disbelievers in the Hereafter."

12:38

وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ

وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

"*And I follow the religion of my forefathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not for us to associate anything with Allah. This is from the favour of Allah upon us and upon mankind, but most people are not grateful.*"

12:39

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ ءَأَرْبَابٌ مُّتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

"*O my two companions of the prison! Are many different lords better, or Allah – the One, the All-Dominant?*"

12:40

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءً سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُم مَّا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَانٍ إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"*You worship nothing besides Him except names which you and your forefathers have named, for which Allah has sent down no authority. The command belongs only to Allah. He has ordered that you worship none but Him. That is the straight religion, but most people do not know.*"

12:41

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَمَّا أَحَدُكُمَا فَيَسْقِي رَبَّهُ خَمْرًا وَأَمَّا الْآخَرُ فَيُصْلَبُ فَتَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِن رَّأْسِهِ قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْتَفْتِيَانِ

"*O my two companions of the prison! As for one of you, he will give drink to his master (the king) of wine; and as for the other, he will be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. The matter about which you both asked has been decided.*"

An Extraordinary Environment In Which Prophet Yusuf Gave His Call

Before explaining these noble ayaat, let us first bring to mind a picture of that extraordinary environment in which this da'wah (invitation to faith) was delivered, and consider the circumstances under which Prophet Yusuf carried out the work of calling others to Allah.

First of all, look at **who Prophet Yusuf was**:

Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) was the son of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), the grandson of Prophet Ishaq (Isaac), and the great-grandson of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). He is the same Yusuf (peace be upon him) about whom the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

"The noble one, son of the noble one, son of the noble one, son of the noble one."[1]

Look at his lineage — the highest and most exalted. Look at the nobility of his family — unsurpassed. Look at the inheritance of prophethood — carried in his line for generations. Look at the knowledge of Allah (ma'rifah) — a legacy passed down through his blessed forefathers. Look at the character and conduct — a treasure transferred from one generation of this family to the next. He is mentioned in the heavenly scriptures; his story appears in the

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[1] It is reported from Abu Hurairah R.A.:

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ: إِنَّ الْكَرِيمَ ابْنَ الْكَرِيمِ ابْنِ الْكَرِيمِ ابْنِ الْكَرِيمِ يُوسُفُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ بْنِ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ.

The Prophet ﷺ, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "The noble son of the noble son of the noble son of the noble one was Yusuf ibn Ya'qub ibn Ishaq ibn Ibrahim."

books of religion, wisdom, and literature.

He possessed unmatched outward beauty; Allah Almighty had made him a complete combination of beauty of appearance and beauty of character. If he was a model of physical elegance and dignity on one side, then on the other he was also a mirror of purity, refined morals, and elevated character. His personality brought together beauty of form, beauty of conduct, and beauty of intellect and thought in perfect harmony.[2] Along with this, his nature was soft, his feelings and emotions were delicate, and natural nobility was added to all of this. In the true sense, he was a reflection of perfect beauty. This beauty was evident not only in his outward grace but also in his habits, manners, manner of speech, and style of thinking.

Before we enjoy the majesty and eloquence of these noble ayaat, we must also keep before us the environment in which Prophet Yusuf presented his message. Read these noble ayaat[3]:

وَجَآءَتۡ سَيَّارَةٞ فَأَرۡسَلُواْ وَارِدَهُمۡ فَأَدۡلَىٰ دَلۡوَهُۥۖ قَالَ يَٰبُشۡرَىٰ هَٰذَا غُلَٰمٞۚ وَأَسَرُّوهُ بِضَٰعَةٗۚ وَٱللَّهُ عَلِيمُۢ بِمَا يَعۡمَلُونَ (يوسف 19)

"And there came some travellers, and they sent their water-boy who let down his bucket into the well. He cried out, "Oh, what a great find! Here is a boy!" And they took him secretly ˹to be sold˺ as merchandise, but Allah is All-Knowing of what they did."

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[2] This beautiful combination is reflected in the following dua that the Prophet ﷺ taught us:

عَنِ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ حَسَّنْتَ خَلْقِي فَحَسِّنْ خُلُقِي

Ibn Mas'ud reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "O Allah, You have made my creation beautiful, thus make my character beautiful." (Sahih Ibn Hibban 959 – Saheeh Li Ghayrihi).

[3] In the original booklet, a part of ayah 19. We have included the full ayah here.

Note from the editor:

The members of that caravan sold Prophet Yusuf (AS) for a meagre price, eager simply to be rid of him. Their actions reveal their inability—and blindness—to recognize the immense worth and potential he possessed. He was then purchased by a man of high rank, the chief minister of the land, who welcomed him into his household in Egypt. Allah SWT blessed Prophet Yusuf with wisdom, purity, and impeccable character, enabling him to avoid every form of sin and moral failing. Despite his innocence and uprightness, he was nevertheless imprisoned for a crime he did not commit.

ثُمَّ بَدَا لَهُم مِّن بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا الْآيَاتِ لَيَسْجُنُنَّهُ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ" (يوسف 35)"

"Then, even after they had seen the clear signs, it appeared to them that they should imprison him for a time."

Prophet Yusuf is thrown into prison, and an accusation is levelled against him from which Allah Almighty declared him innocent and pure — just as the wolf was innocent of the blood of Yusuf[4] when his brothers falsely accused it of devouring him.

In any case, Prophet Yusuf enters prison as a supposed criminal based on a false charge. In prisons, only the orders of authorities are carried out; the prison staff has nothing to do with right or wrong. They simply obey orders.

The jail officers take prisoners into their custody in the same way that we receive mail. The postman has nothing to do with what is written in the letters, and the one receiving them accepts them without question. Whether

[4] *This is the translation of an Arabic proverb — "Such-and-such a person is as innocent of this accusation as the wolf was innocent of the blood of Yusuf."*

the envelope contains a telegram bringing sudden news of a tragedy or a message of joy — it makes no difference.

Thus, the prison staff deal with the inmates as though they were inanimate objects or movable goods. They took hold of the hand of Prophet Yusuf; how would they know who he was, or what noble family he belonged to, or the heights of character he possessed?[5] All they knew was that an order had been issued to put him in prison. So, like all the other prisoners, they placed him inside the jail.

When the matter of right and wrong could not be resolved outside the prison, how could it be settled within its walls? Once its iron gates closed, everyone inside became the same. All were deprived of the fresh air of the outside world. A prison has a world of its own, and prisoners have nothing but time to talk.

Respect and Trust

Despite the fact that all prisoners are equal, Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) became the center of attention within just a few days. Among the

[5] When working in the field of *Dawah*, it is inevitable that we will encounter people who respond with harshness or rudeness. In such moments, we should remind ourselves that their behaviour may resemble that of the prison guards whom Prophet Yusuf (AS) had to deal with. Their harshness was not necessarily a reflection of their true character, but rather a consequence of the circumstances and pressures they were under.

Likewise, those who show rudeness or hostility toward us may themselves be misinformed, influenced, or even misled by others. Yet, many times, when the light of truth reaches them, they become among the finest servants of Islam and some of the most devoted callers to it.

inmates, there was widespread talk of his nobility and beautiful character. The darkness that hung over their environment was dispelled by the radiance of his noble manners. His seriousness, dignity, the loftiness of his character, the maturity of his personality, the devotion in his worship—and then, in his interactions, his cheerful disposition, humility, modesty, and courteous behavior toward everyone—there was nothing in him that did not leave its mark.[6] The hearts of the prisoners were drawn to him involuntarily, and they found themselves compelled to respect him.[7] And all of this was a manifestation of Allah Almighty's purpose and wisdom.

What happens after that? Among the prisoners, two of them see two different kinds of dreams. These dreams were unlike everyday dreams — they were unusual and strange. One of them saw that he was pressing wine; the dream weighed on him like a nightmare, and he could not understand what it meant. The second man saw that he was carrying bread on his head, and birds were eating from it. This too was a strange and extraordinary dream.

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[6] From this, we learn a profoundly important lesson: our external environment should not dictate our behaviour. We cannot hand over control of our character to circumstances. Rather, we must take responsibility for our own conduct, choosing consciously how we respond.

Regardless of the situation we find ourselves in, we should display the highest level of *Akhlaq* and moral excellence. When we uphold noble character in the face of difficulty or hostility, hearts naturally incline toward the truth and the message we represent.

[7] It has long been the practice of our *Aslāf* to emulate the example of Prophet Yusuf (AS) during times of imprisonment. They strove to embody the noblest Akhlaq, becoming sources of light, guidance, and comfort for those around them. Many of them wrote books while in prison, taught fellow inmates, and continued their service to the Ummah even behind bars. Numerous great scholars left lasting impressions on the hearts and lives of people during their periods of imprisonment, turning hardship into a means of spiritual elevation and benefit for others.

Allah placed it in their hearts to turn to Prophet Yusuf. Their decision to seek the interpretation of their dreams from him shows that their human nature was not dead, and that the faculty of observation was still alive within them. And indeed, it has always been the case that people rely more on their own observations and experiences than on logic and philosophy.

In any case, both of them narrated their dreams. One said, "I see myself pressing wine." The other said, "I see bread on my head from which birds are eating. Please tell us its interpretation — we see you as a very good man; we find you among those who do good, from among the *muhsineen*."

The meaning of Ihsan

What is the meaning of *ihsān*? The men who asked Prophet Yusuf for the interpretation of their dreams had said to him:

"إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ"

— "We see you among those who do *ihsān*."

What does *ihsān* mean here? Did Prophet Yusuf possess wealth that he kept with him and used to distribute among the prisoners? For when we hear the word *ihsān*, this is the first thing that comes to mind. But considering the condition Prophet Yusuf was in, such an idea is not only unreasonable — in fact, it is impossible.

Ihsān means to do something in the best, most excellent manner — to perform an action at the level of perfection. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was asked, "What is *ihsān*?", he replied:

"أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ"

"Ihsān is that you worship Allah as though you see Him. And if you cannot see Him, then know that He surely sees you."[8]

Therefore, the meaning of *ihsān* here is this: *We find you to be at the level of ihsān in your worship; we find you at a level of excellence in your speech and dealings that reflects the true degree of ihsān.*

Since around Prophet Yusuf there had formed an atmosphere of accusation and slander (and because in outward beauty Prophet Yusuf was like a shining full moon, it is appropriate to describe the environment of accusation and infamy around him as a "halo"[9]), people had begun to think all sorts of things. Rumors were circulating, conjectures were being made. Some said, "Why else would he be imprisoned?" Another said, "He must have done something wrong." Someone else said, "No, a man like him could never do such a thing." But inside the prison, all those halos of suspicion faded away. And a different halo formed around this "moon of beauty and character": a halo of respect, trust, admiration, and praise.[10]

A Matter More Concerning Than Terrifying Dreams

Prophet Yusuf understood that what had brought these two men to him — what had compelled them — were their frightening dreams. And this

[8] This is from the famous hadith known as Hadith Jibril. See Saheeh Bukhari 50.

[9] "Halo" in this context means 'a surrounding atmosphere or aura that forms around a person'. In this para, it is referring to an atmosphere of accusation, suspicion, and slander.

[10] This reminds us that instead of being preoccupied with answering suspicions, defending ourselves, and responding to every accusation, the best response is to let our character, **akhlaq**, integrity, and conduct speak for us.

showed the level of knowledge they possessed; such matters were, in their view, the most important issues of life. For them, the meaning of sorrow and comfort, success and failure, was entirely tied to this short-lived worldly life.

But Prophet Yusuf had been nurtured in the lap of prophethood. Allah Almighty had granted him insight and understanding, and his temperament had been shaped for the mission of divine messengership. He realized that these two companions of imprisonment were forgetting a reality far more important than their dreams — a reality far more deserving of concern and thought. That reality was faith in Allah — faith in the Pure Being who creates and governs the universe; faith rooted in tawḥīd, pure monotheism, untouched by any trace of shirk.

And after all, what really is the reality of this life? No matter how long it may seem — is it anything more than a dream? These two companions of captivity were in far greater need of knowing the "interpretation" of this long dream we call life, and they were more deserving of being reminded of it. Forgetting or neglecting this would bring far greater danger and harm than the dreams they had seen.[11]

The natural compassion and love for people's welfare that Allah had placed

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[11] Just like those two prisoners, it is extremely important for the callers toward Islam to understand this reality — the reality of our short stay in this world, and the reality of the next life. When this understanding and perspective are clear, they will realize the true importance of daʿwah, and they will understand the time, effort, commitment, and resources that must be dedicated to it.

But in the absence of this understanding, daʿwah begins to feel like a burden — something from which one eventually seeks relief. There are many such examples: some people come to love the mission of daʿwah and give themselves fully to it, while others begin to see it as a burden and abandon it after some time.

May Allah ﷻ protect us from being among those who move even an inch away from this path — a path that leads to light and success in the eternal life.

in Prophet Yusuf's heart[12] demanded that he alert them to the real danger, and tell them the one thing that would truly benefit them — especially at a time when their minds were more prepared to understand, and their attention had been sharpened, even if it was due to something seemingly small.[13]

In any case, this was an opportunity to make them understand — and it was possible that such an opportunity might not come again. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf considered it appropriate not to let this moment slip away, and to sow a good seed into the soft soil of their receptive minds. The request for the interpretation of the dreams had created a suitable occasion and a natural opening for conversation.[14]

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[12] This is another attribute of the callers toward Islam — a natural love for people. It should be evident in the way they speak, the way they walk, the way they carry themselves, and the way they deal with others.

[13] This highlights the importance of understanding the audience — recognizing their emotional state, being aware of their level of attention, and knowing what will affect them and when it should be said. It also requires sensitivity to the circumstances in which people are found and the conditions that shape their thinking. Such social and situational awareness is essential for duʿāt, the callers toward Islam.

[14] This highlights the importance of conversation starters. Once the initial barrier and hesitation are removed and the conversation begins, it becomes much easier to convey the message of truth. A good beginning creates comfort, builds trust, and prepares the heart to listen. Many people who engage in daʿwah — whether toward Islam or toward any other idea — look for conversation starters in order to open dialogue and break down barriers. This approach requires wisdom, sincerity, and a clear intention in directing the conversation toward what truly matters.

Maulana Maududi explains it as follows:

"We learn from this that if a person is imbued with the true and strong desire for propagating the truth, he can very gracefully turn the direction of the conversation towards the message he desires to convey. On the contrary, if a person has no strong desire for the propagation of the message, he never finds any opportunity for it, even

Through this, he could invite them to the religion of Allah, awaken their sound nature, and guide them so they might discover clear and comprehensible monotheism.

A Beautiful Manner of Beginning the Conversation

The conversation began in a beautiful and eloquent manner. To understand this, one must realize that for a lofty subject, the style of speech should also be lofty. This holds great importance in the etiquette of communication. If this is not the case, the beauty of the message is lost.[15]

Just as a magnificent and splendid building requires an entrance gate that is itself elegant and grand — so that the moment one sees it, the dignity of the building becomes apparent, and the visitor feels ease and delight in entering — likewise, the beginning of noble speech should match the excellence of its purpose.

Prophet Yusuf began his conversation in such a way that he first reassured them that he *could* interpret their dreams, and that the purpose for which

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though hundred and one such opportunities might have come his way which could have been utilized for this purpose. But one must be on his guard to discriminate between the right use of an opportunity by a wise man from the crude propagation of a foolish and uncultured person, who tries to thrust the message into the ears of unwilling hearers and succeeds only in creating aversion for it in their minds because of his crude way of presentation."

[15] From this we learn that saying the right thing alone does not fulfil the responsibility of conveying the message. It must also be conveyed in the best manner and with the finest conduct. Many people speak words that are true and beautiful, yet present them in a harsh or careless way, and this often produces harm instead of benefit.

they had come to him would be fulfilled[16]. He let them know that they had not made a mistake in choosing him; they had come to the right person. The one they had turned to was indeed capable of doing what they needed, and could deliver them from their confusion and guide them toward the correct course of action.

This is natural: a person in need wants his need fulfilled quickly. When a sick person goes to a physician in the hope that he will diagnose his illness and himself prescribe a remedy, and that physician begins to delay, or says, "I will check in some books," or "Let me consult another doctor first," the patient's heart breaks and he returns in disappointment—and perhaps never comes back to that physician again.

Therefore, the first part of meaningful conversation is to create confidence in the heart of the seeker—that the one he has approached is capable and will indeed meet his need.

Thus Prophet Yusuf said:

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[16] This is about building rapport. Why should people listen to you? Do you have the right credibility? Do they feel safe and comfortable approaching you? When these concerns are addressed, communication becomes easier, and the audience is generally more receptive to what is being said.

This is why many speakers begin their talks or presentations by explaining the value they bring — their skills, knowledge, experience, successes, and so on. However, one must always remain genuine and avoid exaggeration or false claims. People can sense insincerity far more easily than speakers often realize.

At the same time, intentions must be clear. Such introductions should never be for personal boasting, but only to open the door to communication for the sake of daʿwah. One should be expressive and confident, yet humble. Any credentials that may be impressive in themselves but are not relevant to the audience or the topic at hand should be left unmentioned.

قَالَ لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِۦٓ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِۦ قَبْلَ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمَا ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِى رَبِّىٓ إِنِّى تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَهُم بِٱلْءَاخِرَةِ هُمْ كَٰفِرُونَ

I will, with Allah's permission, tell you the interpretation of these dreams before you are served the food you eat[17]*. this is part of the knowledge which my Rabb has taught me. In fact, I have forsaken the faith of those people who do not believe in Allah and even deny the hereafter.*

The meaning of the above ayah is that their need would be fulfilled without delay, and the answer to what they had asked would be given to them promptly.

It is obvious that both of them were prisoners and bound by the rules of the jail; they could not sit with Prophet Yusuf for long. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf said that before your food — the food that normally comes to you — even arrives, I will give you the interpretation of your dreams and send you on your way.[18]

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[17] The original text included this āyah only up to this point. However, we have cited the complete āyah here.

It should be noted that our translation represents one possible interpretation of this āyah. The other possible translation is:

Yusuf (A.S.) replied, 'I can even tell you what kind of meal you will be served before you receive it. This 'knowledge' is from what my Lord has taught me. I have shunned the faith of a people who disbelieve in Allah and deny the Hereafter.

In the following paragraphs, Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi explains an analysis of the two interpretations of this āyah. Both interpretations are grammatically sound. The difference in interpretation arises from what the pronoun "*hā*" in بِتَأْوِيلِهِۦ refers to.

[18] From this we learn that daʿwah should be concise, yet eloquent. When it becomes too long, people lose interest. When it is too drawn out, they struggle to focus. And when it goes beyond their level of understanding, their minds close to it.

This ayah has been explained in two ways.

First Interpretation

Prophet Yusuf said:

"لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ"

—that is, *before the food which you are provided with every day arrives here, I will inform you of its details*, meaning what food is going to be served today.

Prophet Yusuf's intention was to make them realize that he had knowledge of matters beyond normal means, and in this way give them confidence that he was indeed capable of interpreting dreams.

Second Interpretation

The first interpretation (mentioned above) is, in my view, not convincing. Firstly, because pointing to something from the unseen cannot be established from this. In prisons, meals are not prepared in many varieties; usually only one or two types of food are served in rotation. Any prisoner could easily guess what food would be brought. What extraordinary ability of Prophet Yusuf would this demonstrate?

It is also mentioned in some narrations that the arrangement of the prisoners' food had been placed under the supervision of Prophet Yusuf himself. If this is true, the matter becomes even more ordinary — for if someone is in charge of the kitchen, and he tells someone what will be served today, there is nothing remarkable about that.

In my opinion, the correct interpretation of this ayah is the one found in some commentaries, in which the meaning of the ayah is explained as follows:

"Before your food even arrives, I will already have informed you of the interpretation of your dreams."

This was so that the prisoners who had seen the dreams would feel assured that there would be no delay, and that the situation would not reach the point where the prison guard would come and scold them, saying: "Return to your places! How did you come here? Why have you come?"[19]

Egypt, even in the time of Prophet Yusuf, was a fairly civilized country. Meal times were fixed, and the time for food had almost arrived. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf said that before the food—already on its way—reached them, he would give them the interpretation and complete the matter.

Mentioning Something Pleasant Creates Cheerfulness in the Mind

There is another subtle point here: for prisoners, the mention of food is something highly pleasing. Therefore, Prophet Yusuf mentioned food in order to create a sense of cheerfulness within them. The mention of food is pleasant for everyone — all the more so for prisoners. For them, it is something especially desirable. Thus, when Prophet Yusuf spoke about it, their hearts opened up, and they became more ready to listen further.

[19] This shows the importance of making people feel safe when giving daʿwah. They should not be compelled or pressured to listen. Rather, the setting and approach should be such that people come forward willingly and engage in conversation out of their own interest. Care should also be taken that they are not made to stand on roads or in places where there may be discomfort, inconvenience, or any kind of risk. Daʿwah should always be carried out in a manner that respects people's dignity, comfort, and safety.

Redirecting the Conversation Toward Divine Invitation in a Sweet and Gentle Manner

Then the prophetic temperament becomes visible. He does not attribute the ability to interpret dreams to himself, nor does he present it as a personal skill. Rather, he declares it to be the result of Allah's grace.[20] And here he gently redirects the direction of the conversation in a most wise and subtle way — a degree of wisdom almost unparalleled.

He said:

"ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي"

"This is from the knowledge that my Lord has taught me."

And with this, he takes hold of the thread of the advice he intended to give them.

Reflect on this: before giving the interpretation of the dream, Prophet Yusuf fulfilled the duty of invitation and guidance in a profoundly wise manner. Had he stated the same point directly, without gently shaping the direction of the conversation, the prisoners would not have been ready to listen. They

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[20] This is the balance we mentioned earlier. Prophet Yusuf demonstrated his competence and gave confidence to those who questioned him, yet he did so with humility. Instead of taking credit for himself, he attributed it to the true source of all knowledge and success — Allah ﷻ. This was the practical manifestation of the truth:

سُبْحَٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنتَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ

"Glory be to You (O Allah)! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. You are truly the All-Knowing, All-Wise."

were frightened by their disturbing dreams; they wanted someone to reassure them immediately. They were in no condition to endure long discussions.

But when Prophet Yusuf explained that the interpretation of dreams was not due to his own knowledge, intelligence, or sharpness—that it was entirely the grace of Allah who had granted him this ability—he gently introduced them to the message of calling toward Allah. ***And he did so in a way so subtle, so light, and so naturally acceptable to the heart that no one could reject it.***

Reflect on this wise style of invitation: suppose Prophet Yusuf had addressed the dreamers in this manner—"My respected companions, be patient. I will tell you the interpretation of your dreams shortly. But listen: there is something far more important and worthy of concern than these dreams."

Obviously, they would never have listened with calm attentiveness, especially regarding a subject to which they were not accustomed, and for which they had not come.

Therefore, Prophet Yusuf continued the existing flow of conversation without changing the topic and, in the same breath, said:

ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي" (يوسف 37)"

"This is from the knowledge my Lord has taught me."[21]

Now keep clearly in mind the environment in which this invitation was

[21] This miraculous and eloquent passage related to Prophet Yusuf is found only in the Qur'an; it is not found in the Torah. When one examines this incident in both the Qur'an and the other scriptures, it becomes clear that the Qur'an has selected only those parts that contain the elements of daʿwah and tablīgh, as well as lessons and moral instruction. As for what is mentioned in the Torah, it consists mainly of historical details, numbers, and descriptions of journeys and distances.

being given. In this wise method — whose parallel is found only in the invitation of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, as will be mentioned later — I do not find, in the long history of those who have called to Allah, an environment more delicate than this, nor a style more subtle and refined than this.

Keep before you the environment in which this invitation was given. In this wise manner — whose parallel, if found anywhere, is only in the invitation of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, which I shall mention later — I do not find, apart from that, in the long history of inviting to the religion and of those who carried out this mission, an environment more delicate than this, nor a mode of expression more subtle and refined than this.

Read from where the conversation begins — "لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ" — up to the words "ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي", and observe how, from the word "*Rabb*," he opens a pathway to the sermon of *Tawḥīd*. Can the direction of speech be changed in a manner more effortless, more gentle, more acceptable, and more swift than this?

It is as though he is saying: *What standing do I have that I should interpret your dreams? I am a weak and helpless human being; I have no power even over myself. People dragged me into prison, and I could not resist them. Someone like me — weak and powerless, confined in captivity, unable to help himself — how could he ever claim to occupy such a lofty station as to speak of knowledge and insight? It is nothing but the grace of Allah that He granted me knowledge. This is from the knowledge my Lord has taught me."*

Traversing a Hundred-Year Path in a Single Moment

Here another question arises: Why did my Lord grant me this knowledge? This provided Prophet Yusuf with yet another way to turn their attention

toward the invitation to Allah. In reality, this was a long and difficult path, but Prophet Yusuf, through his wisdom and insight, his luminous spirituality, his clarity of inner vision, and the deep understanding bestowed upon him by Allah, traversed this path in a single moment.

This was a path which, if described as "a journey of a hundred years," would not be an exaggeration — a path that philosophers and thinkers take years upon years to travel. Yet the prophetic strength of Yusuf covered it in the blinking of an eye.[22] He said:

ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُم بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

[22] Philosophers have engaged in long debates for years, decades, and even centuries. Throughout history, thinkers have devoted entire lifetimes to debating the nature of divinity, questioning beliefs, challenging claims of authority, and reflecting on epistemology and the nature of knowledge. Yet many times they remain lost, caught in their own assumptions, extrapolations, and speculative reasoning.

Prophet Yusuf, however, traversed this entire path instantly — not through philosophical argument, but through prophetic clarity and divine guidance. He attributed all knowledge directly to Allah ﷻ and openly dissociated himself from false objects of worship and from a people who were upon falsehood. Where falsehood prevails, there can be no loyalty and no blind following; there is no taqlīd of a people who are grounded in error.

It is only in such a state of clear separation from falsehood that Allah opens the doors of special knowledge and maʿrifah. The special knowledge his companions were seeking — in relation to their dreams — could not coexist with attachment to false beliefs or continued adherence to error.

This points to a profound reciprocal relationship: true knowledge and maʿrifah naturally lead to disengagement from falsehood, and sincere disengagement from falsehood invites divine guidance and understanding. Through this method, Prophet Yusuf directs others toward the very path he himself followed — a path upon which he attained special knowledge — away from false gods, away from blind following, and toward firm attachment to the worship of the One True God, Allah alone.

"This is from what my Lord has taught me: that I have abandoned the way of a people who do not believe in Allah and who deny the Hereafter."

After saying this, Prophet Yusuf sensed that he now stood on firm and elevated ground. It was as though he had ascended a mountain or a high place and was now addressing those below him:

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَأَرْبَابٌ مُّتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

"O my two companions of the prison! Are many separate lords better, or Allah — the One, the All-Dominant?"

Had Prophet Yusuf spoken these words at the very beginning, his companions would have found them heavy and difficult to accept; neither their hearts nor their minds would have been ready for them. But now the moment had arrived — and now it was his place to say: *"O my two companions of the prison! Are many separate lords better, or Allah — the One, the All-Dominant?"*

Here, the arrangement of speech, the order of expression, and the Qur'an's sequence are all worthy of deep reflection. Had he continued in the earlier direction alone, the message might have become dry and lifeless. But Prophet Yusuf, through his insight, noticed the signs of reassurance upon the faces of his listeners and realized that they were now prepared to hear this heavenly call for this is the message of Allah, which He conveys to His servants through His prophets. He asked: *"O my companions of the prison! Are many divided masters better, or Allah — the One, the All-Dominant?"*[23]

[23] This is a very important and beneficial method of teaching. Instead of giving direct answers, the students or listeners are left with questions that they must answer themselves. In this way, they use their minds and approach the matter thoughtfully and rationally, rather than emotionally or blindly. They also come to own the answers they arrive at, because those answers are their own and not merely borrowed from someone else.

Observe how different this tone is from the earlier one. The first tone, in which he said "ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي", was gentle and tender. But now, when he says, *"Are many separate lords better, or one God, the One, the Irresistible?"*, the tone is filled with strength and confidence.

Had Prophet Yusuf spoken here in the language of philosophy or scholastic theology, they would have understood nothing at all.

A Qur'ānic Miracle

Then he said:

"مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءً سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُم مَّا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَانٍ"

"Those whom you worship besides Him are nothing but names which you and your forefathers have invented. Allah has sent down no authority for them."

These are merely names — but they have no corresponding reality. These are names that possess no true existence. Some names were invented by the Greeks; some were given by idol-worshipping nations; and likewise, other peoples created imaginary gods based on nothing but their own assumptions, giving them names, while those beings had no existence whatsoever. In this manner, every nation eventually produced its own complete *'ilm al-aṣnām* (mythology).

The miracle of the Qur'ān is that for such things — which never possessed any real being — it uses the word "اسماء" (names). Only those who have studied the history of world religions and who understand the history of mythology (*'ilm al-asṭūra*)[24] can truly appreciate the miraculous precision of

[24] ʿIlm al-Asāṭīr (Mythology) refers to the study of myths (*asāṭīr*, singular: *usṭūrah*) or legendary narratives (*myth*) that exist within a society. A myth is a legendary story passed

this expression.

These are nothing but names. Where and when did such deities ever exist? Where and when was there truly a "god of rain" or a "god of war"? In what era or century did these so-called gods live? Did their existence ever appear outside the realm of human imagination and conjecture? The Qur'ān declares that they are "*only names which you and your forefathers have invented from your own minds; Allah has sent down no authority for them*."

The miracle of the Qur'ān remains valid for all time. Idolatry is nothing but a collection of such names. The Qur'ān exposed their reality in just a few words:

"إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ"

They are nothing but names.

The Method of a Caller Who Is Favoured With Divine Inspiration

At this moment, Prophet Yusuf sensed that the emptiness within their hearts and minds had now been filled, and that wisdom required the discussion not be prolonged, nor the subject of Tawḥīd expanded beyond what their capacity allowed. A skilled physician knows exactly how much food and

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down from the time of one's ancestors which has come to be accepted as history, and which is generally regarded within that society as having an element of truth. Such narratives reveal a culture's or society's worldview and its understanding of the world.

Historians state that the word *usṭūrah* originally entered Arabic from the Greek word *historia*, which carries the meaning of "history," and from which the English word *story* also developed.

how strong a dose of medicine a patient needs. He knows the patient's condition and his ability to absorb what is given to him. Likewise, the one whom Allah has granted the ability of calling to His path knows that once a point of balance has been reached, one should not go beyond it.[25]

This is why restricting daʿwah and preaching to rigid rules and fixed frameworks [and addressing everyone in the same manner instead of according to their individual circumstances and needs] ultimately limits its effectiveness. Daʿwah requires vitality, passion, and warmth. It is also unjust to the dāʿī and the preacher to confine him within inflexible regulations.

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[25] Maulana Maududi explains the foregoing discussion in the following words:

"This also teaches the right procedure that should be followed in presenting the message. Prophet Yusuf does not present, at the very start, the details of the creed and regulations of the faith but the most fundamental thing that distinguishes a believer from a non-believer, that is, the distinction between Tauhid and shirk. Then he presents it in such a rational manner as cannot fail to convince any man of common sense. And his argument must have impressed deeply on the minds of the two slaves. Which is better, various gods or One Omnipotent Allah? They knew it from their personal experience that it was much better to serve one master than a number of them. Therefore it was far better to serve the Lord of the universe than His servants. Moreover, he does not invite them directly to accept his faith and discard their own faith, but he very wisely draws their attention to this fact; This is Allah's bounty upon us and upon all mankind that He has not made us the servants of any other than Himself, yet most of the people are not grateful to Him. Instead of serving Him alone, they invent gods for themselves and worship them. Then it is also noteworthy that his criterion of the faith of his addressees is based on wisdom and has no tinge of bitterness in it. He says: The gods whom you call, the god of wealth or the god of health or the god of prosperity or the god of rain etc. are mere names you have given them without any reality behind them. The real Owner of everything is the Supreme Allah Whom you also acknowledge as the Creator and the Lord of the whole universe. He has sent no authority and given no sanction to anyone for Godhead and worship, but has reserved all the powers, all the rights and all the authorities for Himself, and commanded, "Serve and worship none but Me."

اللهم صل وسلم
على النبي محمد

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